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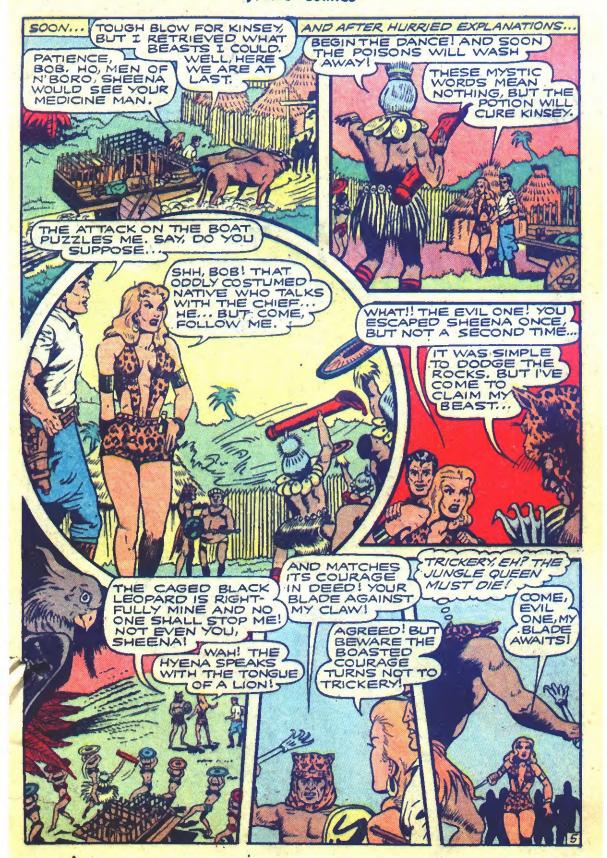






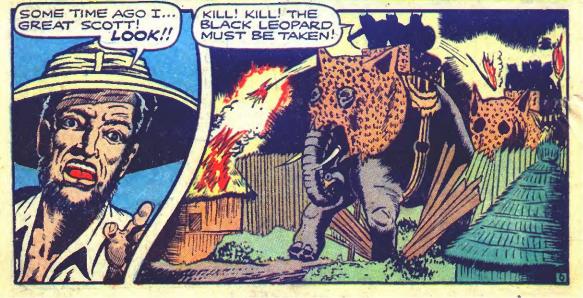






























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SHEENA AND THE DEADLY WATER

By W. MORGAN THOMAS

SHEENA waved a gay farewell as Bob and little Chim, the chimpanzee, disappeared from view around the bend of the jungle trail. They were going to the village of the Rapani, there to trade a little ivory and a few skins for the things needed in the tree hut. As a rule, Sheena did not favor the killing of her jungle creatures for purposes of trade, but the ivory was but that taken from Soo-kunjahh, the graveyard of the elephants, and the skins those of jungle killers who had been punished by Sheena herself—with death.

"And now," said Sheena to herself, "to do what has long needed doing! Sheena will explore the death waters!"

With Bob and Chim out of the way she felt free and strong as she could never feel when they were present. Danger in many forms lurked always in the jungle, and while Sheena had no fear for herself—for was not she the Queen of the Jungle—she worried constantly about her two companions. More than once she had saved them, at the risk of her own life, and always she watched them with the tenderness of a mother and the fierce, all seeing eye of the jungle falcon.

"Ho-eecee," cried Sbeena as she swung through the trees at a great speed, headed for danger. "It is good to tread the branches so lightly, to command in the jungle, and to know that Bob and Chim are safe. At least for a little time. I will look into this matter of the deadly waters, and they will be none the wiser."

And so, as Sheena approached a place where the river ran deep and fast, over myriad sharp and jagged rocks, she could not help feeling just a little sense of relief that today, just this once, she was alone. There was danger ahead. The thought thrilled through her, tensing every supple muscle of her tawny body. Danger! And for once Sbeena faced it alone . . .

Some days before news of this new peril had been brought to Sheena by the witch doctor of the Gunee tribe, one Kreetcha by name. Sheena had never liked the man, always bowing and scraping to her, but with the light of treachery burning in his narrow eyes, and at first she was inclined to think he merely lied for some obscure purpose of his own. But the evidence had been too much, and Sheena had put aside her distrust for Kreetcha to look into the matter. Always, with Sheena, the welfare of her people came first

Some dread thing was stalking the people of the Gunee tribe. Their village stood on the river, near the rapids, and it was the custom of the tribe to use the water for many purposes, such as bathing, drinking, washing skins and many other things.

"And now," thought Sheena, "some evil thing beneath the waters has terrified the Gunee. It comes silently, without warning, and seizes them as they swim or stand in the water. It leaves no trace."

She came to a gap in the trees, tensed a moment, then went flying across to a stout vine dangling on the far side. Then she halted and loosened the knife in her scabbard. "Sheena will find this evil thing and slay it."

She came at last to the river. Just upstream, beyond the cruel rocks, lay the village of the Gunee. Sheena had intended to seek out Kreetcha, to allay the fears of he and his people, but now she changed her mind. She still did not trust Kreetcha. Perhaps it would be wiser to explore a bit before she approached the village.

Sheena swung down out of the trees and cautiously approached the bank of the river. There, behind a sceening growth of succe bush, she waited. Soon she beard the voices of women coming from just downstream. Walking with the stealth of a tiger. Sheena

approached the spot whence came the voices.

Two Gunee maidens were bathing. They laughed and chattered, until the listening Sheena hegan to wonder if that wretch, Kreetcha, had not lied to her. Surely these girls seemed afraid of nothing.

Suddenly, then, it happened! One of the girls, who had been laughing but a moment before, screamed in shrill fear and beat at the water with frantic hands. The other girl stood rooted to the spot with terror. Slowly the helpless girl sank, screaming all the while, as something dragged her down and down.

"Ayeeeee!" It was Sheena, her hody a bronze lance hurling itself into the water. "Do not fear, little one. Sheena comes!"

Then the cold and muddy waters closed over her and she was swimming with all her strength for the dim, shapeless form of the drowning girl. Her knife was clutched in her teeth, and Sheena's eyes glowed with anger even in the murky depths.

Down. Down and still down. Sheena had not thought the river so deep. Dull pain throbbed in her lungs, and still she had not caught the body of the girl, which seemed always just to elude her grasp. Something, some strange power, drew the body of the girl always down and away from Sheena.

Sheena saw a strange thing. The body of the girl vanished into what seemed a dark patch on the hottom of the river. Sheena, her lungs almost bursting now, plunged downward once more, beating at the water with her finely muscled legs, and swam into the dark patch. At once she noticed that the water was colder. Dreadfully cold. As cold as death!

And then she felt the net! Sheena knew, in that instant, that she had fallen into a trap. Wet, slimy cord enmeshed her and she was hauled deeper and deeper into the gloom of what she now knew to be an underwater cavern.

"Fool," Sheena raged even while her lungs threatened to burst asunder. "Fool! You trusted Kreetcha against your own better judgment and now..." In a rage she slashed at the cords of the net, using her fast fading

strength. Then, just as a great hlackness was upon her, she was drawn out of the water and onto the stone ledge of a great cavern. Torches flickered against the clammy walls and cast great gouts of shadow to the bigh ceiling, hut Sheena saw only the man who grinned evilly at her. It was Kreetcha. And nearby, smiling in triumph, was the girl whom Sheena had tried to save. The hait in the trap.

Kreetcha smiled again, an evil thing, as he stared down at Sheena. "So the great Sheena fell into humble Kreetcha's trap," he gloated. "It was all part of the trap, my story, the girls bathing, everything. You were watched from the moment you left your tree hut, Sheena. And now it is over. My hatred for you has won, Sheena. I will slay you and then who will question my rule in the jungle! And I will let you die quickly—but your friends, the white man and the chimpanzee, shall not be so fortunate!"

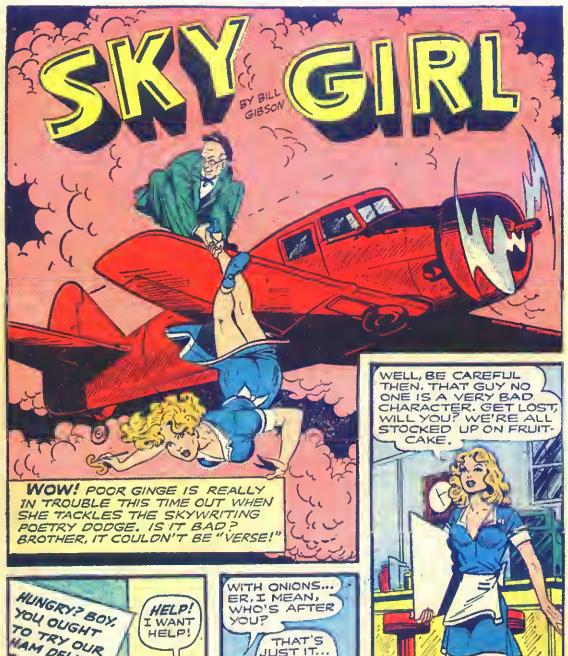
Sheena smiled. But she said nothing. Kreetcba, in his vengeful triumph, had stepped close to where she lay helpless in the net. And he had not noticed the torn place, the opening, where Sheena had slashed at the cord in her despair. She could not get out of the net, but she could reach through that opening! And Kreetcha was too slow in withdrawing his ankle. He screamed once as Sheena clutched his leg in a grip of iron and rolled hackward, net and all, off the ledge into the cold water. She had breathed deeply—but Kreetcha had spent much wind in talking!

As Sheena, an hour later, approached the tree hut, she saw that Boh and Chim had returned. Bob met her at the door, laughing. "Ah, dull one. It is about time you came. Chim and I have much to tell you. We are fine traders, we two, and the merchants of the Rapani are sad tonight. Tell me, Sheena. What did you do to amuse yourself? Or did you sleep the afternoon away?"

Sheena laughed back at her mate. "You are right," she agreed. "I am a dull one. And. I have been sleeping." She feigned a yawn.

"I almost didn't wake up at all."

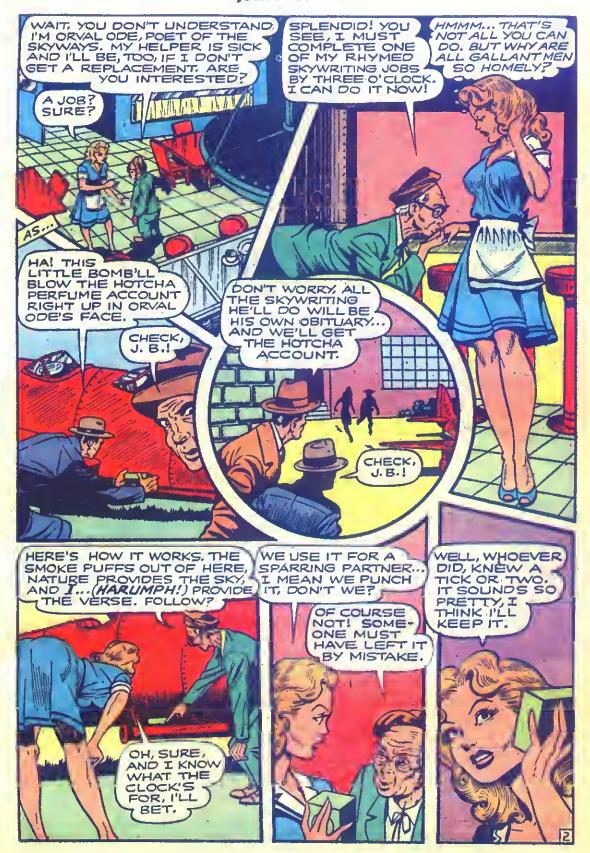
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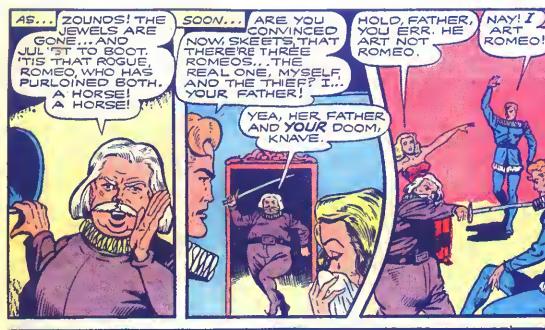




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